N.W. China AF13

217.

The greatest object of interest in Hsingan fu is an ancient museum, the Be ling, the forest of inscription stones, a small cypress wood with pavilions and temple-like buildings in which for many years already hundreds of stone slabs bearing inscriptions and classical paintings were gathered together for official reasons into a gold-mine for Sinology. A few months before my arrival the famous Nestorian tablet had been hastily brought there from its former place in the western part of the city by 50 coolies because it was in danger of being taken along by an American collector. It tells of the great dissemination of Nestorian Christianity in China during the eighth century. Besides that, every stranger is supposed to look at the old governor's yamen in which Emperor Kuang sü and Empress Tse hi had lived during the Boxer Rebellion. After the court left, this yamen remained unoccupied because no one else was considered worthy of dwelling in the imperial rooms. The rooms were very simply furnished. On the walls hung kakemonos, flowers and luck-bearing Chinese pictograms, many of which the Empress Dowager was said to have designed and painted herself. In the courtyard of the one-time imperial palace I was shown a walled cistern that was many meters deep. In it - my cicerone said - the unfortunate emperor attempted to commit suicide in order to escape the torments of his aunt. Much more entertaining, were two festivals which were celebrated in the city while I was waiting there. One of them was a large parade of the Manchu garrison which at that time with 3, 900 families (about 15, 000 souls) occupied the entire northeastern part of the city; the second festival was a pupil and student celebration that took place on the old Chinese parade ground in the northwest corner of the city. On the one hand, the class which was at that time still in control and the banner people, the mainstays of the ruling dynasty; on the other hand, Chinese youth who were celebrating the end of their annual examinations, those new educational methods which were supposed to lead the kingdom of the middle, the Chinese common people, into new paths, to new bloom. In place of the old state competitions in which calligraphy and poetry and essays, interlarded as much as possible with quotations from the classics, were the dominating factors and determined the maturity and dignity of the candidate for the highest posts in the state, /329/ and for which one prepared privately, the Manchu had set up schools in which mathematics, natural sciences, foreign languages and political science were taught and examined. Now a general sport festival ended the school year of the elementary schools, of the preparatory schools, and of the

701

871